

ACSOR/D3 Systems: Afghan Futures - Wave 3

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Afghans React Negatively to Civilian Killings; U.S. Favorability Matches its All-Time Low

Six in 10 Afghans say the recent massacre of civilians in Kandahar province represents a broader pattern of mistreatment by U.S. soldiers, with one in four reporting incidents of violence or property damage by soldiers within their own communities.

Given such complaints – buttressed by considerable outrage over the civilian killings, allegedly by a U.S. service member – favorable views of the United States, at 43 percent, now tie their low in survey data in Afghanistan dating back seven years, a vast 40 points below their peak in 2005.

More troubling, this new Afghan Futures survey by the Kabul-based Afghan Center for Socio-economic and Opinion Research ([ACSOR](#)) finds that a third of Afghans, 32 percent, say attacks on U.S. and NATO forces by Afghan soldiers “can be justified” under current circumstances.

Yet the results of the survey are not all negative for the United States and NATO, whose leaders meet in Chicago this week with Afghanistan as the main topic on their agenda. Seventy-four percent of Afghans still say it was good that U.S. forces came into their country to overthrow the Taliban in 2001, a result that marks the Taliban’s persistent unpopularity.

Deterioration in favorable views of the United States, while significant, is not dramatic. And there’s been essentially no change since February in the number of Afghans who favor immediate withdrawal of Western forces, 26 percent.

The survey was completed April 11-18, 2012, via face-to-face interviews with a random national sample of 2,039 Afghans in all 34 provinces of the country. It’s the third in a series of publicly released surveys on attitudes in Afghanistan sponsored and conducted by ACSOR. [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York produced this analysis of the results. The previous survey was conducted Jan. 24-Feb. 3, before both the civilian killings and the Feb. 20 incident in which U.S. soldiers inadvertently burned copies of the Koran and other holy texts.



For all the controversy, the results also show success in the field: Just 18 percent of Afghans say the Taliban have grown stronger during the past year, down 13 points since November 2010 to the fewest by a substantial margin in polling data back to late 2007. Forty-seven percent instead say the Taliban have become weaker.

Still, recent events have taken a toll. More than half of Afghans, 53 percent, suspect the March 11 attack that killed 17 Afghan civilians in Kandahar was carried out by a group of U.S. soldiers, not, as the authorities assert, by a single service member acting alone. Eight in 10 have heard about it, among whom 87 percent say people in their area are talking about it. Overall, 77 percent of Afghans describe themselves as upset (24 percent) or even angry (a majority, 53 percent) about the incident.

Nearly nine in 10 also have heard about the burning of the Koran and other religious texts by U.S. forces, although eight in 10 say that event hasn't impacted their view of Western forces.

Isolated case?

As noted, six in 10 (59 percent) say they think the civilian killings reflect a broader pattern of mistreatment by U.S. soldiers, rather than an isolated case; and 51 percent think U.S. or NATO forces treat Afghan civilians disrespectfully on a regular basis.

Fifty-four percent, moreover, say they think Western forces often target the wrong homes on anti-insurgent "night raids." (Sixty percent oppose such raids, for which the United States last month transferred operational control to the Afghan government.)

Fewer, but 24 percent, report mistreatment at the hands of U.S. or NATO soldiers in their own communities – killings, reported as the worst such incident by 10 percent; physical injuries, 6 percent; destruction of livestock or property, 5 percent; and disrespect, 2 percent.

Identifying what depredations actually have occurred is beyond the scope of this survey; the results, rather, indicate the extent to which Afghans attribute destructive or undesirable behavior to Western forces.

Blame for violence

In one apparent impact of these concerns, just 20 percent now say Western forces have gotten better recently at avoiding civilian casualties, down from 30 percent in a November 2010 poll.



And 26 percent of Afghans now chiefly blame the United States, its leadership or Western forces for the violence occurring in their country, numerically a high, albeit by an insignificant 2 points, in publicly released polling data since 2007. That compares with a low of 10 percent in 2009.

Still, twice as many, 55 percent, mainly blame either the Taliban (38 percent) or al Qaeda or foreign jihadis (17 percent) for the country's violence. And as in previous polls, very few express favorable views of the Taliban – 8 percent in this survey (it's the same for the insurgent Haqqani network). That compares with favorable ratings of 90 percent for the Afghan National Army, 84 percent for the Afghan police and 83 percent for the central government.

At 43 percent, favorable ratings of the United States are down by 8 points from their level in a previous Afghan Futures survey in February, although they've been this low once before, in November 2010. About as many, 42 percent, express confidence in the ability of the United States and NATO to provide security. That's been as high as 67 percent in October 2006, and as low as 36 percent, also in November 2010. (The latter was a period of spreading Taliban activity and widespread economic discontent.)

In terms of solutions for Afghanistan's long turmoil, the survey finds stability in views that the Afghan government should seek to negotiate a settlement with the Taliban (75 percent, although 57 percent of those who favor a settlement also say talks should be held only if the Taliban first stop fighting). Two-thirds also say they'd back an agreement that ceded control of some provinces to the Taliban, identical to results from February's [Afghan Futures survey](#).

Methodology

This survey was conducted April 11-18, 2012, by ACSOR via in-person interviews with a random national sample of 2,039 Afghan adults in all 34 of the country's provinces. Fourteen of the 118 originally sampled districts and 46 of the 264 sampled settlements were inaccessible, chiefly for security or transportation reasons, and were randomly replaced. Women could not be interviewed in Paktika province, which represents 1.7 percent of the national population. Data were weighted by population of province and sex within region. The survey has a theoretical margin of sampling error of 3.5 percentage points. ACSOR, based in Kabul, with field staff in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan, is a subsidiary of [D3 Systems Inc.](#) of Vienna, Va.

Langer Research Associates of New York, N.Y., specializes in survey research design, management and analysis, and has partnered with ACSOR and D3 on a range of surveys in locales including Afghanistan, Iraq and Yemen for media, government and nongovernmental organizations.



For the full questionnaire, overall results of this survey or methodological details please contact ACSOR/D3 Systems, 703 388-2450, info@d3systems.com. Custom analysis also is available, including evaluation of results by region, across population groups, or in statistical analyses predicting key dependent variables.

